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Program planning

Notes for community leaders



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Meaningful programs

In the long run, the programs offered by a voluntary organization to its members, or to the community, are what turn people on—or off.

People are attracted by programs that have real meaning for them:

- meetings and conferences that lead to action or bring them information they need
- sports or craft groups that bring them the skills or activities they want
- study programs that meet them on their own level
- special events that help them to know their neighbors better.

Organizations that provide these programs will be accepted as an important part of community life. When the topics or activities are closely related to goals of the organization – and when a series of programs leads, by logical steps, toward a particular achievement – the interest of the members will be sustained over a long period.

Programs that have these qualities of meaning and progress cannot come about by chance or by trusting to luck that something suitable will turn up. Comprehensive plans must be laid out far in advance. Any program-planning group faces opportunities and challenges that are vital to the development of the whole organization.

What makes a program?

A program without a purpose, or with a purpose that is not clearly stated and understood, may not be able to compete successfully for the attention of the community. Only the most enthusiastic people will give up their favorite TV programs to attend a meeting or a workshop unless they understand that the meeting has a purpose that is important to them.

Once the planners have the purpose of the program clearly before them, they have done a very important part of their job. The next step is to consider the people for whom the program is being planned - the audience or the participants. How can the purpose be made clear to them? What will interest them? What do they want?

After that comes the "how" of the program - the process.

Whether the program is to take the form of a gala night or a business meeting, a party or workshop, the tone must be set at the beginning. The audience must be warmed up - whether for hard work or for relaxed play. The leaders usually accomplish this by letting them know just what to expect and by building up a feeling of anticipation.

When the group has been well prepared, a few surprises in the form of new information, new ideas, or new variations on old themes, will add to the enthusiasm. In some types of program, the presentation of conflicting views may provide the stimulation, and careful planning will be needed to prevent the conflict from distracting the group from its purpose.

As the program develops, each member of the audience should find something to give him or her a feeling of being involved in the event, and of sharing in the success achieved. An alert program committee recognizes the value of variety in the program method it uses. Boredom and apathy are not as likely to develop in a group that is often asked to participate in the presentation of the material as in the group that is always expected to be a polite audience for a lecture or a film.

The stimulating effect of the unexpected in a program, at just the right time, may occasionally spark the energy for a long step forward.

And no program should end before the participants see clearly the next step to be taken – the action that is to follow the fact-finding meeting, the next project to be tackled by the craft group, the work to be done with the funds raised at a special event, the consolidation of the liaisons developed at a conference.

Principles of program planning

Over the years, as groups of planners have exchanged ideas and experiences, a useful set of principles has emerged. Here are some of the important ones.

☐ Planners should keep the objectives of the organization clearly before them as they work. A program committee should never resort to getting someone or something just to fill in the time in a program schedule, without making certain that the ideas presented by that film, speaker, activity or entertainment fit the purpose of the program. Programs are best planned in terms of topics rather than available people.

☐ Effective planning always develops directly out of the interests and needs of the members.

☐ Those who will carry out the program and participate in it must be able to contribute to the making of the plan. Most people accept the idea that planning is necessary in their daily lives. We all plan our work, our holidays, our gardens and our homes. We work most enthusiastically for plans that we have made ourselves, or that we have helped to make.

☐ The best plans develop when the program committee seriously tries to give the expressed desires of the members a form suitable for action.

☐ Planning ideas come from three main sources - the members of the organization, the professional staff (if employed), and from outside resource people.

☐ A ready-made plan can seldom be adopted completely. Planning must take into account the individual differences of people, time and locale.

☐ Planning should be fully recorded while it is being done. The record will serve as valuable information in evaluating the program and as a guide to future planning.

☐ Every program plan should include a scheme for evaluating both the plan and the program it produces. See the Notes for Community Leaders booklet on Evaluation for information about the use of evaluation in program planning.

Role of members in program planning

Running through several of the principles of program planning listed under the last heading are the suggestions that:

- planning begins with the needs and interest of the members
- members share in the planning by expressing their needs and interests
- members take some responsibility in the planning.

What are the best ways to go about getting suggestions from the members? Here are a few ideas.

Buzz-groups The members at a general meeting may form groups of six or eight without leaving their places. (The scheme needs to be carefully and clearly explained to avoid confusion.) Each buzz-group chooses a spokesperson and after about 10 minutes of discussion he or she will report to the general meeting the program suggestions of the group.

It is also the spokesperson's responsibility to see that everyone in the small group has a chance to contribute.

Interest is added if the final list can be posted up on a blackboard as it is being reported. When the duplications have been weeded out, the suggestions will serve to guide the program-planning group.

Evaluation sheets and questionnaires The program committee can plan a carefully worded questionnaire for the members. Or a question such as "what program would most interest you?" may be added to the regular post-meeting evaluation sheets. The questions should be worded so as to find out:

- what individual members want from the organization
- what the members think the organization should do
- what the members think of past programs.

Continuous evaluation is part of the program-planning process. The reactions of the members to the programs offered them, if honestly stated and seriously considered, are guideposts for future planning.

Opinion polls A committee takes on the job of arranging to interview, either face-to-face or by telephone, all or some of the members of the organization. They collate all the suggestions received and offer them for the approval of the membership. Great care must be taken to frame the questions so that they will be clearly understood and will produce useful answers.

Suggestion box If brought to the members' attention often enough, a box for suggestions may yield some program ideas.

Brainstorming Brainstorming is a discussion technique by which a large or small group of people, in an atmosphere of complete freedom, can produce a host of ideas. Since the group only aims at quantity and takes no time to evaluate the various suggestions, the quality of the contributions may vary from useless to brilliant.

Every suggestion even though it may appear senseless, should be carefully recorded. The least practical idea may lead, through the association of ideas, to the best suggestion of the session. The list of ideas is carefully edited before being put to use.

Suggestion symposium A committee may undertake to prepare and present for discussion a series of program suggestions. The discussion is opened to all the members after the committee has completed its presentation.

Informal conversation Some of the best program suggestions grow out of casual conversations at social events in the community, over coffee cups after the meeting, or when members chat with their friends and neighbors.

The program committee

Some community organizations appoint small committees to plan their programs. The committee may draw up an outline plan for the approval of the executive, or, the executive may give the committee an approved outline within which it is expected to work.

It is important that the committee have a knowledgeable and respected committee chairperson to co-ordinate and lead the committee through the program plan. This person will also be the chief person reporting to the executive for the committee.

The small group of planners may be greatly expanded at times when the organization is undertaking to carry out ambitious projects. A big job may have to be divided among many conveners and sub-groups.

Service clubs and other community groups often rotate the responsibility for planning individual programs among all their members. The executive committee itself may make an outline plan for their guidance. Other groups who are associated with national or international organizations may receive more or less detailed plans for programs, along with quantities of resource material and other forms of assistance from their parent associations.

Wherever program planning is done, the job always has the same goal - to devise action to implement the purposes accepted by the members of the organization. To do this job well the group should be representative, and should have effective liaisons with the members. If the committee members also have liaisons with other voluntary groups in the community, some of the snags of overlapping schedules and unnecessary competition will be eliminated.

Step-by-step planning

Outline plan for the season, year, or longer period
Whether it is prepared by the executive and handed to the program committee for action, or whether the planning group build it themselves, it will set the long-range goal and govern

the purpose of each individual program.

General plan of the content What steps will lead most surely to the goal? The content of each program in the series will be decided in a general way at this stage. Sometimes the series of programs will be obviously related. In other cases they may seem to be quite diverse because each of the programs of the series has some special short-term objective that is part of the ground-work necessary to prepare the way toward the achievement of the long-range goal.

Program methods At this stage the methods to be used will probably be chosen after some careful research into the interests of the members. Whether the group will be learning new dances, enjoying a community festival, or exploring an urgent community problem, a variety of methods is most apt to produce a lively pattern of participation. Several different methods may even be combined in a single program, and the series should aim at as much variety as possible.

Estimating costs It will now be possible to make a careful estimate of all costs involved, and a realistic plan for meeting them should be decided upon before any final steps are taken.

Evaluation of the plan Are the long-range goals and the immediate objectives attainable? Are the ideas expressed in them in line with the way the members think? Have the members shown interest in the content of the programs? Will the methods be over their heads or monotonous? Research and careful evaluation are as essential in these first stages of program planning as they are at later stages. See Notes for Community Leaders booklet on *Evaluation*.

Advance arrangements As soon as the general form of the first few programs has been decided, times and places may be set. Advance arrangements for things like mechanical aids,

films, speakers, musicians, resource people and resource material can be set in motion.

Publicity Those who are to be responsible for publicizing the event must have the information they need early enough to do their own careful planning. Plans that are completed too late to allow time for the adequate notification of everyone interested, and for a well-thought-out publicity approach, are not good plans – no matter how brilliant. Publicity releases should give, in addition to the details of time and place, the purpose of the program and some description of what will happen. See Notes for Community Leaders booklet on *Publicity and Public Relations*.

The publicity effort should be checked (evaluated) while it is in progress to make sure it is reaching the audience. See *Evaluation* booklet in this series.

Carrying out the plan The next step is to set deadlines for carrying out every phase of the arrangements. Each responsibility is recorded and delegated to a particular person or sub-committee. Many organizations use a responsibility chart like that on the next page to make sure that everyone knows what to do, and when his or her job is to be completed. The chart is also a means of letting each group see what others are doing and how the jobs fit together.

Alternate plan What if the chairperson and the vice-chairperson should both come down with the flu? The guest speaker's car might break down on the road. The feature film might not be delivered. What then? An alternate program plan must be worked out just as carefully as the original scheme. Deadlines and responsibilities for this plan should be included in the responsibility chart.

Program evaluation The final step is to plan how the committee is going to find out from the participants what they thought about the program. What are their reactions to the presentation? Did it meet their expectations and needs? What

do they think might be improved? Are they ready for the next step or the next program in the series? See the Evaluation booklet for suggestions about how the planning group uses the evidence it collects to modify its plans.

Centreville Art Club Responsibility chart Monthly meeting - March 15th - What does modern painting mean?			
Job	Purpose	Complete before	Responsible
The panel	Arrangements with moderator, Mr. Smith Arrangements for panel members Exploratory meeting of panel Assign officer to introduce panel Assign officer to thank panel	Feb. 1 Feb. 7 Feb. 25 Mar. 13 Mar. 13	Program Committee Chairman: Mrs. G. Brown 150 Main St. E. Phone 124-6530
Publicity	Posters for P.O. and community centre Notice to paper Notice to members Telephone members Display announcing April meeting	Mar. 1 Mar. 5 Mar. 10 Mar. 13 Mar. 13	Publicity Committee Chairman: Mr. H. White 92 Grant Ave. Phone 421-9876
Publications	Collect books and prints of modern paintings	Mar. 12	Publications Sub-committee Convener: Mrs. M. Howard 117 Smith Blvd.
Hospitality	Assign members to welcome moderator and panel members Welcome club members	Mar. 15 Mar. 15	Hospitality Sub-committee Convener: Mrs. J. Jolly 188 Main St. W.
Social hour	Refreshments Entertainment	Mar. 12 Feb. 15	Social Sub-committee Convener: Mrs. W. Cook 132 Leslie St.
Music	Select records for refreshment period Accompanist	Mar. 13 Mar. 1	Program Committee Mr. Somers
Alternate program	Arrange for local art teacher to stand by with short talk and exhibition of prints Book film "Klee Wyck"	Mar. 1 Feb. 15	Program Committee Chairman: Mrs. G. Brown 150 Main St. E. Phone 124-6530
Evaluation	Prepare end-of-meeting slips	Mar. 13	Program Committee Mr. Cousins

Planning a conference

Today great use is made of the conference to tackle single problems, or sets of problems.

It is not often that the program committee of a single voluntary organization would have to tackle this big job of planning all by itself. But nearly every organization does occasionally help with the plan of a joint conference in the community or district, or a conference of affiliated organizations.

Conference planning usually begins when an advisory steering committee has determined that the conference method is the most likely to produce a solution or a clarification of the problems that have been expressed. A conference chairperson is selected and a conference-planning committee is set up.

It is vitally important when undertaking a large planning task that communication between all the people involved in the planning process be clear, thorough and regular.

Planning for a conference may conveniently be divided into two sections. One group can draw plans for the program and another can plan the administrative arrangements and services.

The group charged with planning the actual sessions of the conference may be given a fairly complete agenda that has been agreed to by the sponsoring groups. At some conference the participants may set the agenda during the first session. This is a time-consuming process, though it has the great advantage of involving all those who take part in setting the goals of the conference.

Planning for the conference program will follow through the steps already outlined. The program group will deal with the general plan, the methods, the evaluation and the back-up plan.

□ The general plan will detail the methods for communication, evaluation and reporting. The planners will have

to provide for all the information the participants will need for their discussions. Printed information may be mailed to participants before the conference. Complete reports will be required as soon as possible after the conference is over.

☐ The methods to be used for the various sessions (plenaries, discussions, lectures, workshops, and so on) which fill out the structure of the general plan will have to be decided. Suitable speakers, resource people and discussion leaders will have to be found and briefed. The method of preparing reports will also be planned.

☐ The planners of the program will probably design some method of evaluating or testing their plans as they develop.

☐ An alternate or back-up plan is needed for each phase of the conference.

The management committee planning for the administration and services of the conference will carry out the remaining steps.

☐ Costs will be estimated and a budget prepared.

☐ Advance arrangements will be made for housing the sessions and the delegates, for registration, for stenographic and duplicating services, for a service bureau, for recreation facilities and social events.

☐ Publicity will be planned.

☐ Responsibilities will be assigned and deadlines set for the carrying out of each phase of the plan.

The success of a conference depends, to a large extent, on developing an atmosphere in which every delegate can feel relaxed and comfortable. It is the responsibility of each participating organization to make sure that its delegates go to the conference sessions fully prepared for what will happen. A conference plan, in which every detail has received the most careful study, and which is clearly understood by everyone taking part, also makes a great contribution to the atmosphere that produces results.

Planning a special event

Planning for a special event, such as a large social gathering, pageant or community carnival, will need close attention to the timing, and some careful forethought for contingencies.

An ambitious project may require many hands. Sub-committees made up of people who have special skills, or special knowledge of the community, may be appointed to look after such things as decorations, the sale of tickets, publicity, the refreshments, various divisions of the program itself, the PA system, community singing, costumes, lighting, music, and so on. Some organizations have found that the larger the number of people involved in the planning stages, the more importance the event assumes in the community.

Each sub-committee should have a chairperson designated as the person responsible for co-ordinating, leading and reporting on the sub-committee's activities and progress.

If one of the objectives of the special event is to raise funds, then the facts of experience must be faced. Success is never easy. For this reason the collection of evidence and careful evaluation of progress at every stage becomes vitally important in planning fund-raising events.

The preparation of the outline plan and the continuous integration of the planning of all the sub-groups will occupy the program committee itself. An important part of their task will be to keep the detailed planning in tune with the objectives and purposes of the whole program.

For many community organizations, an annual or regularly held special event is the core around which most of the other activities revolve. When entertainment, food and hospitality form a part of this program, it is nearly always worth the extra time and money to see that they are of the highest quality.

A community party

Suppose a community organization has decided to hold a community party, either for some specific short-term purpose or because it fulfils one of the basic purposes for which the group is organized. By the time this decision has been reached, the first two stages of the planning are complete. The steering committee is ready to set the time and place and to think about publicity.

The party may very well be given a special theme or motif around which the publicity can be built. The theme idea also helps add significance and form to the program and to the decorations.

Publicity

Planning the publicity might easily be the first responsibility delegated to a sub-group. Using the chosen theme (citizen participation, ethnic culture, festival of the arts, the youth scene or a historic period) as the basis of their planning, they will begin to prepare releases for press, TV and radio, posters, flyers and handbills, bumper stickers. Many key people in the community may be interviewed and personally invited to attend the affair.

Facilities

The facilities committee has many things to take care of after the hall or rooms have been booked. Parking arrangements, cloakrooms and washroom facilities are important. The lighting, and the PA system must be checked. Kitchen facilities must be provided for the refreshment committee. Chairs, tables or other furniture may need to be located.

Program

The program committee will be made up of those who will conduct the activities, and any assistants they may need. They are wise to prepare far more activities than will fill up the time allotted to the program. If some item has to be dropped others should be ready to replace it. Activities that have been successful with other groups may prove unsuitable for your group. New ideas are usually enthusiastically received, but they should not be forced on people who are not ready for them. A good stock of old favorites should be included in the plan.

Decorations

The theme of the event governs the color scheme and the motifs of the decorations. If details are worked out in advance, it will be possible to enlist many volunteers and each willing worker can be shown exactly what to do. Guard against underestimating the time needed for jobs of this kind! If leaders with special skills can be found for the group, some of the difficulties will be avoided.

Refreshments

Food is an important element of any party. The theme of the party may be used to present the refreshments, and the dishes themselves may be connected with the theme. The refreshment committee plans should be checked and rechecked with the reports of the other committees so that they are reasonably sure they have neither too little nor too much.

Hospitality

Members may be delegated to welcome people as they arrive, to look after the special guests, or carry out other hospitality duties. These duties might be carried out by the same people who assist the activities leader.

Clean-up

When the party is over, important jobs remain to be done, and they also need to be planned in advance. Items that have been borrowed or rented must be checked and put in a safe place. If the room is to be used for other purposes the next day, it must be put back into its original condition. If decorations are carefully taken down and packed they may be used again. If the clean-up committee is large and if its work is well planned, the jobs need not weigh too heavily on any individual.

Arrangements for a meeting

At a business meeting, a committee meeting or a study-group session, the program may be entirely taken up with the order of business or agenda, which is planned by the executive officers or by the chairperson. If the program is also to include a social period, a speaker, or a film, then the program committee will have the job of planning that part of the session.

For large general meetings, the physical accommodations may also be part of the job of the program committee. For the meetings of small discussion groups or committees, the chairperson usually keeps an eye on the arrangements, even if he or she does not personally set out the chairs, supply pencils or provide ash trays.

Whether a meeting is formal or informal, large or small, the group will make better progress if the members are reasonably comfortable and free from outside distractions.

Points to bear in mind

How will the members be seated in relation to the leaders and fellow members?

Sometimes, when a meeting is large, the only accommodation available will have fixed seats. People in the rows behind the first will find themselves talking to the back of a line of heads. If any other arrangement is possible, avoid this one. Real discussion is apt to die under such conditions.

If the group is small, a good arrangement is a circle around a table. Quite a large group can be accommodated around a hollow square or U of small tables. If these arrangements are impossible, a circle of chairs (the chairperson in one of them) is good for stimulating the interchange of opinions. Any arrangement that places the discussion leader apart from the group is less effective.

Are the seats comfortable? To sit for an hour or more on a hard, straightbacked chair is Spartan discipline. It isn't always possible to get really comfortable seating, but it pays to go after the best available. The group will appreciate it. On the other hand, one should guard against soft easy-chairs which will lull the members into a state of dreamy semi-consciousness.

Is the ventilation adequate? If people yawn it may be for lack of oxygen rather than for lack of interest. In a stuffy, smoke-filled room, discussion is not at its brightest, and is rough on the non-smokers. Fans and windows should be arranged to let in fresh air and clear out the smoke haze.

If possible, it is best to separate non-smokers from smokers in the seating arrangements. If the meeting is in a small area, the majority may wish to suggest that no smoking be allowed, but that smoking breaks be arranged.

Does each member know all the others? It prevents embarrassment if the group members know each other's names. Verbal introductions place too great a strain on memory, if many people are meeting for the first time. Place cards or label cards can make things easier.

Are the visual aids arranged in the best possible way? The location and convenience of projectors, screens, diagrams, pictures and other visual aids should be planned in advance. A competent projectionist is a must if films are to be used.

Are there too many distractions? Traffic noises, a sing-song in the next room, a flapping blind, a noisy fan, light shining in the eyes, or anything that disturbs the group, handicaps the concentration needed both for expressing and receiving spoken communications. Though an absolutely quiet environment is usually out of the question, every reduction of distraction is worth the trouble.

Little things make a difference — a few extra pencils, a supply of paper, a hard surface for writing if there are no tables.

Sources and resources

No program-planning committee is entirely on its own. In every community there are innumerable resources and sources of assistance. Speakers, resource people, ideas and guidance, films, printed matter and facilities of various kinds are to be had, sometimes merely for the asking.

The program committee's job here is one of knowing where to go for what is needed, and of making critical evaluations and choices.

Up-to-date files and records of all available sources and resources All the planning and study groups should be able to refer to these for help. In turn, each group should contribute any information it comes across to these files and records.

Card register of members Members of the organization always represent its most valuable resource. This group will yield a constant supply of ideas and of leadership. The register of the members should indicate their special qualifications, interests and experience. A constant survey of this roll, if it is kept up-to-date, will keep turning up members who have reached a stage where they can contribute in special ways or take on new responsibilities.

Library and clipping system Books, periodicals and pamphlets should be collected and maintained in such a way that the information they contain is always available for working groups. You can never have too much news about how others plan programs, what materials they use, and how successful they are. To be sure that schemes of evaluation are valid, you must be able to call on resources and experience wider than your own.

Filing system Statements of policy and objectives, legislation affecting the organization's activities, and detailed records of its past efforts and achievements need to be kept available for

reference. A thorough study of the organization's goals is good grounding for any planning group - and it may produce ideas for particular programs. Solid evaluation of present progress is difficult without detailed records of the past to use for comparison.

Index of resource people Occasionally leadership from outside the community will be needed to help solve special problems. Many of these special leaders will come from other voluntary organizations more experienced in certain fields, from government agencies, or commercial firms. The file should give all the information necessary to establish the particular qualifications of the people listed. It is usually necessary to arrange well in advance for the services of these people. Program committees should supply the chosen resource person with as much information as possible about their organization, and say quite clearly what they expect him or her to do.

Catalogue of sources Lists of films, books, plays, music, speakers, information, and many services are available from sources in the community, or from provincial, national or foreign organizations. Here are some of the more important.

☐ If yours is part of a large association or federation, other levels may be able to furnish some forms of assistance.

☐ The local library may be active in adult education, and may provide reading materials, films, music, speakers and other services.

☐ Municipal, provincial or national government agencies are interested in the same problems that concern community organizations. The municipal recreation committee, town council, parks board may have interests that overlap those of your organization. They may help to co-ordinate your programs with those of other groups in the community. Materials and information can often be supplied by the departments of the federal or provincial governments. Speedier action will result if the inquiry can be referred directly to the department interested, although letters ad-

dressed to the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa or Toronto will be forwarded to the offices most concerned.

☐ Extension departments of community colleges and universities often have resources such as speakers and booklets available to community groups.

☐ Industrial and commercial firms sometimes offer assistance as a public service. Insurance companies, banks, manufacturers and industrial corporations print booklets, lend films and facilities, and occasionally send out speakers to community groups.

Keeping up-to-date

Filing systems, card indexes and inventories of resources should be organized in a form that will be understood and easily managed by succeeding committee groups. Methods of managing should be given some study so that the one chosen will be suited to the organization and the kind and amount of material to be handled.

A community organization is often wise to place any widely-useful material it has in a public library or some other public place where it may be used by other groups and individuals. Also, every organization should be willing to inform other groups about the sources and resources it has found useful.

A community organization should provide in its budget for the regular purchase of resource materials. It should not confine its acquisitions to those items that can be had for nothing. And a lively organization realizes when material is outdated and information is stale. As the new is collected, the useless should be discarded.

When a new planning group takes charge, a definite arrangement should be devised for the transfer of all useful material and information so that time is not wasted while the new people learn to find their way, perhaps even repeating work already done by an earlier group.

Further reading

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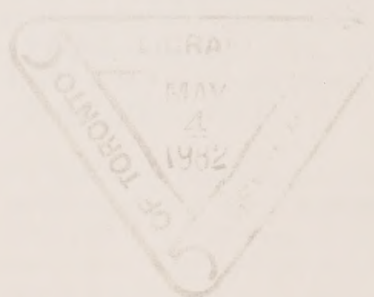
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